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The Michigan Family to Family Initiative

What is Michigan's Family to Family Initiative?

Family to Family is a Child Welfare Reform and Child Welfare Best Practice strategy designed to change the way we do business with families in the child welfare system. We begin with families entering through Children's Protective Services (CPS) and include families where children have been removed and placed either with relatives or family foster care.

Has the Family to Family Initiative been Implemented Statewide?

- Currently the initiative is operational in targeted areas in Wayne County and the following counties: Macomb, Washtenaw/Livingston, Bay, Saginaw, Charlevoix/Emmet, Grand Traverse/Leelanau, Benzie/Manistee and Wexford/Missaukee.
- In 2005, Family to Family is expanding to Antrim/Kalkaska, Otsego/Crawford, Montmorency/Oscoda, Roscommon/Ogemaw, Mecosta/Osceola, Ottawa, Lake/Newaygo, Barry/Eaton, Ingham, Gladwin, Jackson, Branch/Hillsdale, St. Clair. In 2006, Kent, Oakland, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Monroe, Lenawee, Allegan, Genesee, Shiawassee, Lapeer and Tuscola will implement Family to Family. The remaining counties will operationalize the Initiative in 2007.

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In 2 Nutshell, What are the Key Points of Family to Family?

- The Safety and well-being of the child/children.
- Inclusion of the birth family in all decisions affecting their children.
- Inclusion of those most important to a family in decisions affecting them & their children.
- Engagement & development of active, neighborhood/community based partnerships focused on supporting families and collectively assuring for the Safety & Well-Being of children.
- Team Decision Meetings (TDMs) that bring together the family of origin, relatives, kin, fictive kin, DHS child welfare workers, faith representatives, other community representatives, to build the most appropriate Safety Plan for children possible. The result being placement of children in their neighborhoods often with relatives.
- Neighborhood-based recruitment, retention, training and support of foster parents.
- Self-evaluation as to improved outcomes for children and families entering the child welfare system.

How is Michigan's Family to Family Model Implemented?

A major focus of Family to Family in Michigan is the Safety and Well Being of children. Safety is of paramount concern in everything we do when we work with families in our Family to Family initiative.

There are a number of key “change strategies” overarching Family to Family. These follow:

- The first change strategy is family inclusion. We want to be open with families, much more so than in the past. We want to work with families as equal and inclusive partners in meeting the needs of their children. Inclusion means that the family is included in all decisions that affect them and their children. The value this change strategy reflects is “nothing about me, nothing about my children without me.” This approach moves us away from a “medical model,” prescriptive approach, where we *told* families what to do on an assumption that as professionals we always know best and families know little if anything.
- The second change strategy is to safely decrease the number of children placed away from their birth families and the neighborhood/community they know. Available research in the child welfare field indicates that children do best with their families and in their own communities; that in instances when children must be placed away from birth families, they do best if placed with relatives/kin and in their own neighborhood/community. It’s important that children maintain a connection to the neighborhood they know and grew up in, to attend the same school, play in the same play grounds, have the same teachers, maintain friends, connections with church, and other individuals and entities they’ve grown up around. This strategy focuses on the Safety and Best Interests of children and aims to lessen the trauma and anxiety children experience when placed away from their birth families in foster homes unfamiliar to the children and located away from the neighborhood/community they know.
- The third change strategy is involvement of the people most important to the family. This includes relatives, “fictive kin,” other individuals whom the family trusts, relies on, turns to. The strategy acknowledges and recognizes that extended family, relatives/kin, can and often do, play a significant role in support of families im-

many ways. We want people important to the family “at the table” in strategizing how best to help the family and in developing Safety plans that best assure children are safe and protected.

- The fourth change strategy is engaging the community/neighborhoods where referral rates to the child welfare system alleging abuse/neglect are high. In our Family to Family sites, we are building Community partnerships and establishing relationships with a broad range of community organizations to jointly create an environment that supports families involved in the child welfare system. This strategy articulates that strengthening and supporting families is everyone’s business – government’s, the community’s, relatives’, neighbors’, friends’, the faith community’s and so forth. The value reflects the philosophy – paraphrased here - that “it takes a village to strengthen and stabilize families; it takes a village to assure children are safe and protected.”
- The fifth change strategy focuses on what we can do better where children must be moved into out of home placement through court involvement. “What we can do better” includes working harder to increase the number and quality of foster and licensed kinship families in the neighborhoods/communities where children live. It means assuring that children are placed in their own neighborhoods and communities, that siblings are placed together, and, most importantly, that we provide the services birth families and children need timely so that they can be safely reunited.

What Outcomes or Results does Family to Family Strive to Achieve?

There are specific success outcomes for all of our Family to Family sites. These follow.

- Safely reduce the number of children entering out of home placement by assuring that children remain safely with the family of origin or safely with a relative/kin whenever possible.
- Safely reduce the number and rate of children who re-enter out of home placement by assuring that the family of origin is afforded needed services, assuring that children in the home are safe, and by assuring that the family is supported by their neighborhood/community wherever possible.
- Where children must be removed from the family of origin, safely reduce the number and rate of children placed away from their birth families whenever possible.
- Where children must be removed from the family of origin, increase the number and rate of children entering out of home placement who are safely placed in their own neighborhoods or communities.
- Where children must be removed from the family of origin, increase the number and rate of siblings safely placed together in the same placement setting.
- Where children must be removed from the family of origin, reduce the number of placement moves that children in out of home placement experience while in care.
- Where children must be moved from the family of origin, safely reduce the length of stay of children who enter and for those who are in out of home placement.
- Increase the number and rate of children who are safely reunified with their birth families.

Outcome data on the above are collected and reviewed at each site by a community Evaluation Committee that includes parents, foster parents, relatives, DHS and other professionals. Refinements related to Family to Family data is an ongoing effort and the data are also used to improve child welfare practice articulated through the model.

There are some results that we can share. Two Counties have been operational with Family to Family the longest: Wayne County and Macomb County. Wayne has been in operation since 2001 and Macomb since

February 2002. A core outcome of the Initiative is to reduce the number of children entering foster care through involvement of the family, those important to them and others in shaping the most appropriate Safety Plan for the children so that they remain safely with the birth family or with relatives. Wayne County DHS data from 2001 through December 31, 2004 indicates the following trend in this area (children entering foster care).

<u>Calendar Year</u>	<u>Children Entering Foster Care</u>
2001	3,100
2002	2,552
2003	2,557
2004	2,306

The data indicates a reduction in the number of children entering the foster care system over the four (4) year period that Family to Family has been operational in Wayne.

Macomb County began Family to Family in February 2002. The data for the number of children entering foster care for Macomb for a three-year period follows.

<u>Calendar Year</u>	<u>Children Entering Foster Care</u>
2002	317
2003	369
2004	361

Another core outcome for Family to Family is the placement of children with relatives in instances when the family of origin is unable to keep the children safe and protected. Wayne County DHS date from 2001 through December 31, 2004 indicates the following trend in this area.

<u>Calendar Year</u>	<u>Children Placed with Relatives</u>
2001	203
2002	289
2003	493
2004	935

Macomb data for placement of children with relatives for the three years beginning with 2002:

<u>Calendar Year</u>	<u>Children Placed with Relatives</u>
2002	153
2003	168
2004	179

The data indicates an increase in the number of children placed with relatives over the time span that Family to Family has been operational in Wayne and the time period of 2002 through 2004 for Macomb County.

Evaluation of Family to Family Effectiveness

The effectiveness of Family to Family was evaluated in 1998 in an evaluation conducted by the Jordan Institute for Families by Dr. Lynn Usher. It is our understanding that the Institute for Families is an independent entity. The Casey Foundation is in the process of completing preparatory work for a 2006 follow up evaluation of Family to Family across multiple state sites.

The 1998 evaluation of Family to Family was conducted in five states: Alabama, New Mexico, Ohio, Maryland and Pennsylvania. Not every state implemented Family to Family statewide, hence, in four of the five states counties that had implemented this strategy where the ones evaluated. This included Cuyahoga County, Ohio covering Cleveland. Also, Baltimore, Maryland and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Evaluation compared data from early to mid-1990s. Some outcomes by state are described below.

Alabama:

- For children who remained in care more than one year but less than two years, there was a “30% reduction in the number of children who experienced three or more disruptions during their stay in care.” The fewer disruptions or replacements for children in care, the better. This indicator suggested a positive outcome that could still see improvement.

New Mexico:

- For children who had been in care more than one year but less than two years, 82% had had only one placement. This means that the children in these placement settings were not disrupted and not moved to a different placement during the indicated time frame. The fewer disruptions or replacements for children in care, the better.
- The County that was studied in New Mexico, Bernalillo County, saw a decrease in the number of children entering care between 1990 and 1996 (from 616 children entering care to 473 children in 1996).

- Between 1994 and 1996 New Mexico counties participating in Family to Family had lower re-entry rates of children re-entering care than the non-Family to Family counties.

Ohio:

- The number of children safely leaving care within one year in Cuyahoga County increased 12.0% between 1993 and 1996. The focus in all Family to Family sites is on the safety of children whether in care or reunified with the birth family. A 12.0% increase in children safely leaving care and likely reunified with their birth families is a positive outcome for Family to Family.
- The rate of children leaving care within one year of placement in Cuyahoga County in 1996 was between three and 12.0% higher than in any other county that was studied in Ohio.
- The overall rates of re-entry into foster care for Family to Family counties in Ohio was lower for children placed with relatives.

Maryland:

- The total number of children in care dropped significantly between 1993 and 1997 in the two Family to Family counties evaluated (Prince Georges County cases dropped from 353 to 190 and Anne Arundel County cases dropped from 112 to 55). The drop is associated with the goal of leaving children safely either with their birth families or safely with relatives.
- In Anne Arundel County, “re-entry of children placed with relatives were consistently lower than for children returned home.”

Cross State Assessment

There were some common findings across all sites evaluated. For instance, fewer children entered out of home care and those removed from their homes were placed in less restrictive forms of care. The children who did not enter care generally either remained with their birth families and with support services, or were placed with relatives. Often, a differential array of support services was also provided to the relatives and children. Another finding was the increase in the placement stability of children in care. This means that children in care did not experience disruptions, did not experience replacements as often as children in non-Family to Family sites.

Another general finding was that the rate of children re-entering care in Family to Family sites was lower than in non-Family to Family sites in the states evaluated.

As indicated earlier, the Casey Foundation is taking the lead in preparing for a follow up evaluation of Family to Family beginning in 2006. It is our understanding that as in the first study, an independent evaluator will be involved in the evaluation. We look forward to this second evaluation and are certain that Michigan will be one of the sites to be evaluated. Findings of such an evaluation study will be shared with all concerned.